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“Lost Boy Found” by David “Daveykins FoxFire” Gonterman

Book Piece 1 of 5 (The Hole, Chapters 1 to 4)

Beta Stage; dated 21. Jan. 2006

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All boys grow up, even the one they say they don't.

It all depends on what you define as 'Growing Up.'

[Pic of Adam Packbell and Peter Pan]

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presents

Lost Boy Found

by David “Daveykins FoxFire” Gonterman and associates.

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Chapters 1 to 4
BETA Version Dated 21 Jan 2006
Work STILL in Progress

Feedback and Corrections
Suggested and Appreciated

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Dedicated to all those who believed in me. Even when I didn't believe in myself.

Special thanks go to:

Michael Robertson, for Making Linspire, and the Open Office group. (This story is written on OpenOffice.org Writer)

J. M. Barrie, The Walt Disney Company (had to use this reference this time, thanks to "Return to Neverland"), Barry & Pearson, Gail Carson Levinne, and everyone else who kept the Peter Pan storyline live and vibrant up to this point when I get a hold of it and hacked it to oblivion.

LilMarcieMouse of Passporter fame, my net-dot-girlfriend and ten times more of a Disney Otaku than I'll ever hope to be. I'll be too busy trying to hack Disney Magic. (Peter Pan's Flight at Disneyland, turned into a flying coaster? Anyone?)

Stephen King for his novels, which provided me for a lot of instruction and inspiration. And Adam couldn't've gotten his answer to Toodles outside of such. Wish I had Mr. King as an English instructor . . . lolly lolly lolly get your adverbs here.

All those who helped me brainstorm, role play, edit, and most important of all, spell and grammer check this story. Those damned typos and verb tense errors seem to pop up everywhere. Honorable mentions include Drew Rhine, Lord_Graytiger, ThatEmpathGuy, and anyone who commented to my sketch notes over at Deviant Art. By the time this book sees paper print, this list would be too long to add to this book.

All names are written in English format of 'Sir Name first, Family Name second;' All Japanese names have been flipped.

IMPORTANT NOTE: While the timeline of this story is the recent history of the closing years of the 21st Century to the present time, there are some differences in some parts of the environment of this story, especially in technology. There will be some items that will appear sooner than they appeared in real life. The year is only a placemark of the passage of time, save for two important dates: 24th December 1980 and 11th September 2001.

1/5 *The Hole*

Chapter 01

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry titled "Introduction," dated 15 Mar 96

My parents should be thanks for getting me started on this journal. My mom (WendyDarlingMystran¹) suggest that I keep one so that I'll have a place to put down thoughts that come to my mind, or in some cases come loose in my mind. My dad (CopperMystran) encouraged it, especially when he looks over my shoulder—naughty father, bad bad bad!—and says that I have the talent to be at least a halfway decent writer. I think it's because of this when he decided to drop into my lap a computer and access to a web site with all the bells and whistles. (We're talking PHP, SQL, CSS, SSI, and many other combinations you'd never expect to see out of Alphabet Soup.)

I didn't want to go that deep into developing a web site, since it's just going to be a blog anyway—and I shudder to allow any advertisements into something as personal as a high-tech diary—so I went for an open sourced 'Site in a Box' Wiki. I picked this untested (at least at the time I'm typing this) technology in web pages because I can edit every page in the site (as well as those I've let into my 'Inner Circle' group of users, like my friends and family; the rest can make comments provided they register their names and e-mail addy. That'll keep the trolls at bay.) and I can add another page just by stringing a couple capitalized words together. I don't have to think about data files and coding—save for a remedial knowledge that I can put on a cheat card by the keyboard—and I have everything on my own site; text, graphics, and everything, so I don't have to think about maintaining the site. I just have to log on and type away.

So, the big question now that I've gotten out of the main menu on this blog: Where do I begin?

By now, I'm settled in home, in the attic of the Mystran residence, resting on the bed and writing down what I want to type about. I've made a bunch of friends already—including Vixen XO XO XO—and I've just got back in school . . .

I'd suppose that I should get the worst part over with, then. School.

No, it's not SaintNorberts. I'm welcomed there with open arms, and the nuns there have by now accepted me being the class clown there. I'm treated very well there.

That wasn't the case in the school I used to go.

A school in an old town and in an old life that I don't really remember all that well. Nor want to.

It's not because of the time difference (Read AdamsDisappearance) that makes this difficult. If it weren't for mom's PeterPanFetish, I would be convinced that I was abducted by aliens, and then shudder over being Talk Show fodder.

It was because of what happened in Chamberlain, Maine.

1 Hypertext links that are not explained elsewhere in the story are described in brief by footnotes. Links consist of Capitalized words strung together or Underlined or both.

In Paducah, Kentucky.

In Littleton Colorado.

Nothing scares me like thinking of those towns.

Because I know, that whatever happened to me didn't happen, that there would be another town on that list:

Granite City, Illinois.

The town I was born.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled "LogLadderScene":

It was a winter's night in the early 80s. Christmas Eve.

A lonely log ladder, towering above an empty schoolyard, got an unexpected visitor at that strange hour. A boy about 11 years old who had already had enough of his short life to last him to his old age was climbing that ladder. He had enough of the constant bullying from his peers and humiliation by his teachers. It had dragged him from an gifted kinder-gardener to a hopeless flunker at 6th grade. He had advanced in grade only because his teachers didn't want another year of him. He had gone from a child who was only thought the best of to a whipping boy who was there solely to be kicked around for whatever went wrong in the world. He was someone who lived his life from beating to beating and wasn't considered as much, if at all.

The last straw came about an hour before. At the Christmas recital, somebody rigged his Santa suit to disintegrate right where he stood. Everybody in the hall had a good laugh, at his expense.

The child just couldn't stand any more. He ran sobbing past mocking children and irate adults who demanded that he repeat the scene for the next two performances. He ran out of the hall through a snowstorm and into the darkness until he couldn't hear the laughter or any other human voice.

He didn't stop running until he came to that log ladder. He finds himself here during recesses or when his parents wouldn't let him in his own house because he needed to be played at by other kids. He could be found on the top rung with the occasional catcalls from below telling him to jump to his death. All too often someone would climb up to push him off.

There was a good reason why he chose that place as his personal retreat from the world below him. There was a constant wind at the top of the ladder, an altitude where flags flutter and birds fly, which drown out the noise below him. There he could study the clouds at day and the stars at night—yes, he did show up there at night when things at his house got too intense. He could look for any deity that would claim him or any changes in his fortune in the sky above, and in a way, around him as well. He looked for anything that would ensure him that his past existence would not be the theme of his whole life.

Emphasis on the word, 'any,' and he didn't care who. Never mind what he heard in Church.

Every other night he would be found there and dragged back to his school or his house with at least a thorough tongue-lashing but more expectedly worse, but not that night. The snowstorm he had run through had grown to 100-year blizzard proportions with the addition of a thick fog, covering the outside world as if by a flood. The streets were impassable and the visibility all but a few feet. The storm also hid the log ladder below the child in the white and darkness that flowed over and around him as well.

For the first time, the child felt that the world he knew had disappeared. It was just him and the wind around him. The wind seemed to blow louder through his hair and into his ears, whipping around his small frame and up to his chin as if to guide him to look above.

He did look up and saw what would be the one and only Christmas present he ever needed. The holiday would have no more purpose after tonight because of its presence. Because his silent cries in the night had just been answered.

A book as wide as he was appeared in the neatherspace above him. He stood up tall over the top rung to reach for it, welcoming it into his arms. It was made out of wood and bronze with pages lined in gold that gave the inside of the book a fiery glow. The book was locked tight with a latch similar to diaries, and it was encrusted by a foxtail-like shape over the felt covers.

The lock sprang open at his touch, as if it were accepting him, and it opened itself to reveal virgin pages of the softest vellum inside. The darkness of the nighttime snow-blind left his presence as the book opened. A fire that the boy had never seen before surrounded him. He could feel the heat and light it gave off, but it didn't cause him the pain of burning, even as it started to ignite the log he was standing on and even seeped through his body and into his soul. And through his handholds to the book, he could see the flicker of flame begin to write on the pages.

It started with a mere trickle, a sole flame forming a single letter.

Then a word.

Then another word.

A sentence.

A paragraph.

And another.

And a third.

They seemed to pour out from the boy's own soul: Stories. A whole universe of stories appeared from every genre imaginable. He saw a romance tale appear in the parchment, then a mystery, science, history, tragedy, comedy, and more and more. Page after page flew past as it was written in fire and flipped over, yet there seemed to be no end to the pages within the book.

It didn't seem weird to the boy. He was already lost in the words that appeared in front of him. In fact, it felt right to him, more right than anything else that had occurred and occurred in his short life.

And then the dam burst open. Wide!
A picture was painted in flame with the text.

And another.
Several of them merged to form a comic strip.
Then a whole series of strips.
Then a whole comic book.

And another.

Pictures and words danced together in perfect harmony. It almost resembled the music that now sang in his ears and in his mind. A whole world, no, a complete universe, flowed from inside him out onto the paper, and then back to him. He felt it resonate inside him as he felt every story and tale in his own soul.

He never felt so good about anything like this before.

So right.

So alive, alive for the first time ever.

He closed his eyes.

He took in a breath.

He felt his legs take leave of the log below him.

The fire disappeared instantly. The log ladder was completely consumed, no longer needed, mere ashes to be covered by the snow.

The child was never seen again.

Only the stars and the snow were the witnesses.

All of Christmas Day was spent looking for “That God Damned Brat,” as he was referred to by those looking to find him, and then get their hands on him.

The next day was spent doing the same, but then wondering if they should actually be worried about the child.

The day after that, they filed the Missing Person’s report with the cops.

And the day after that, they discovered the remains of his favorite hiding spot, the ashes that was once that log ladder.

By New Years, people even began to miss the child, and regret mistreating him.

There was no signs of kidnapping.

No reports of where he was running away to.

He simply vanished without a trace.

And his last days on Earth were made pure Hell. By their hands.

Within two months, the child was pronounced dead and an funeral by proxy was done in his name.

By the end of the school year, in May, someone started to make a small shrine in his honor, set on the exact site as that log ladder, as a effort to ask for the child's forgiveness. It was finished, installed, and dedicated by the start of the next school year in August.

The shrine became known as "The Lost Boy Shrine," and was dedicated as a national monument of any and all school children who was pushed beyond the brink by the Public School System. Every time a student got teased to the point of committing suicide, beaten to death, driven to drugs, or some other cruel fate, their names were added to this memorial in hope that they would be the last name in the long list.

Of course, this practice came to an abrupt end thanks to the Columbine Massacre. In time, nobody even cared about that old dilapidated shrine anymore. It was left to disrepair, cared for by a few who still know why that shrine was built.

Not that anyone would have noticed anyway.

For the city in question, the story has ended.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled "AdamsDisappearance", Dated 15 Mar 96:

Links of Interest:

- ["Boy Lost In Snow"](#), Granite City Press-Record, 25 Dec 80
- ["Obituary: Adam Packbell"](#), Granite City Press-Record, XX Feb 81¹
- [Scanned School ID](#), Johnson School, Granite City Public School District #9²

I used Yahoo, Google, Metacrawler, Open Text, I'd even use a fine tooth comb to find stuff other than these three items. My dad had to supply me with the first two, and he said it was like pulling teeth.

There was two factors that made this difficult: One, there was a flood in 93 that got too close to the records building which did quite a number on a good chunk of Southern Illinois history. And two is the year involved. 1980. Back when Operating systems uses screens of 40 by 24 *Text Characters*. Apples still come in models where you can make it's symbol with reversed brackets and make pie with their guts after some good use. The Atari 2600 was *it* and can be referred to without the number. And you can have a good game without animating spilled blood. <sniff>

The second factor is of major importance: All this happened, remember in Christmas Eve, 1980. The next time I would look at a calender, It would be January 3, 1996. Fifteen years has passed.

I had my checkup a week after I was found, and they told me that I was a perfectly healthy—more or less—eleven year old.

I should have been 26.

1 Before scanned in, the words "no body have been found," have been highlighted.

2 Due to the ravages of time, most of the details have been worn out, save for "Adam Packbell," and "School Year 1980-1981"

I haven't aged a week in a decade and a half.

I don't like to tell this in public at this time. Like I said, it reeks of Talk Show fodder.
"Welcome to Jerry Springer, tonight's show: Children who were Alien Abductees!"
<Rolls his eyes>

They also checked if I had space probes stuck in me. Nope. Perfectly normal skeleton,
no strange metal thingies implanted anywhere.

But the question needs to be asked:

Where the hell was I these fifteen years?

It's the question I want to ask with this Wiki.

Chapter 02

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled Two Tails Costume

The first clue would be what I was wearing when mom found me; a fully body fursuit of a fox, face mask and twin tails included, which on later inspection seemed to be made from that dysfunctional Santa Costume from that play. I still have this costume, very well maintained and preserved in my home, and have converted it into a giant stuffed animal.

But I have got to ask: WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT!?

Where in the blue hell does an eleven year old go to get a fursuit that fits him? And where is the place where it's okay to go out in public as Miles Prowler 27-fricking-7?! I'm not even a Furry Fan.

If the boy walking down Highway 95 knew he was wearing a full body costume of a two tailed fox, he didn't seemed to care. He didn't care about the fursuit because it was in the evening in the outskirts of Las Vegas, and the temperature was dropping to the point where it was appropriate to put on something warm. He didn't see the occasional passing car and such didn't notice any of them looking his way. What he was concerned about is the bright lights up ahead, and a glittering sign welcoming him to town. The sight was familiar to him, but he wasn't sure why. He wasn't sure why he was heading toward that sign and the shining city that started to glow in the night behind that sign, but he was compelled to go there, like a moth's attraction to the proverbial flame.

His vision of the sign through the costume's eye holes was blocked when a car pulled over. He froze, not knowing what to do. He was ready to book into the desert brush if he had to. He also grabbed a firm hold on the book bag he had slung over his shoulder.

A door opened and a woman stepped out. "Hold on there, young one." The man said as the costumed child took one step back, "Don't be scared." The woman turned toward the fox boy, revealing her reddish-brown hair, simple pair of slacks and blouse, sensible driving shoes, and a pronounced British accent.

The Fox Boy gulped. Even if he was able to talk, he was too scared to do so. He just backed away to put some space between himself and this floating pale face before he'll turn around and book the other way at top speed.

"Don't be frightened, child," she said again. It had a quiet yet distinguished power to it, soft to the ears yet authoritative. And her eyes looked right through his mask and into his soul. It didn't help his nervousness or fear, and he backed away again.

She reached out and placed her hands around the fox boy's shoulders. The child let out a scream when they touched him, mind racked with intense paranoia. The scream stopped when a finger of one of those hands touched the mask's frozen smile.

She let out a long and loud *ssssshhhhhhhhhh* with streamed through the child's ears and into his head. Not as if he'd be able to say anything else. The 11-year-old trembled before her, wanting to pull away from those eyes and run as fast as he could, not knowing or caring where he would be going.

"It's all right, child." She said as she held him there. "You're quite a bundle of nerves here. You're obviously lost, in fact, I don't think you not know where you are, do you?"

It was a question, and despite the calm voice, it carried a demand for the child to speak. However, the costumed fox boy could only shake his head in the 'no' direction.

"I would expect that this place can be very dangerous for someone like you. Do you where you're going or where your home is?"

Another 'no' shake from the fox boy.

"Then come with me, child. I'll help you."

This one was less of a command, more like an invitation. For a while, it has yet to register in the fox boy's mind. He did indeed heard stories about people who would take him away to do something to him. He didn't know what that something was, but he was told that it wasn't nice. However, the child just couldn't refuse this woman. Maybe it was the fact that it would be the second time that he was taken somewhere, the first one caused by the book he was still clutching to with both his arms now. Or maybe it was a touch of naiveté. Or maybe it was the fact that this Engliah Lady's voice was getting to him.

Or maybe it was the intense wave of fatigue that washed over the fox boy's body, and he became sleepy in his costume in the back seat of that car before it even pulled back into Highway 95, limp as the plush animal he resembled . . .

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled WendyDarlingMystran

It might come to the shock to some that there was a Wendy Darling who lived in 190X London, and there are records that she vanished from her home one day after an argument with her parents, only to return telling a story that one J.M. Barrie heard and, with her permission, made it into the play we know as Peter Pan.

There are two details that most people don't know about: One, Wendy vanished again not too soon before WWI and this time went for good. And Two, her siblings lived on and spawned offspring. Their lineage goes on through history past the time when they assisted one Walter Elias Disney with turning the story into one of his top movies to the present day, where a descendant of John Darling was born looking so much like the famous Lost Girl that she got named after her.

This Wendy didn't know whatever or not Peter Pan would come for her to take her to Neverland, despite falling in love with the stories and characters and becoming what we

kiddies would call an otaku¹ about it. Fortunately she came across the next best thing: She fell in love with a magician named Copper Mystran, and moved with him to Los Vegas, Nevada.

She now Wendy Darling Mystran. Most people know her as a Professional Nanny² with very competent references despite being non-conventional as British Nannies go. Think Mary Poppins meets Sharon Osbourne.

I just call her Mom.

It was morning when the boy awoke. He found himself on a comfortable bed in someone's bedroom. The morning sun coming in through a window which overlooked the daytime version of that very same city he was walking toward. It was much closer, with towering buildings of various styles and colors. He was sitting up to get a better look when he also saw what he was wearing: A light green and slightly tattered tunic tied to the waist by a belt, dark green tights, and brown slippers.

What he had on before was nowhere to be found! He scratched his head, only to find a soft felt green pointed hat with a feather stuck in it.

He also noted the woman's voice again, talking to someone he can't hear from beyond the door out the room.

"uh-huh . . . uh-huh . . . uh—hold on there, back up. You lost me at the year, are you sure? . . . Well, hon, the child I picked up is still a pre-teen . . . humph . . . now come on, Copper Mystran. Just because the great-grandmother I'm named after was . . ." She chuckled, then sighed, and then chuckled again. "Of course he's in one of my favorite costumes . . . at least I don't have to measure him for real clothes . . . oh bother, I think he's up, so I'll call you later . . . Lovely."

The woman walked into Adam's view. She had on a bright colored flowing dress, her warm smile, and her British voice. She had in her hand a sort of device that resembled a phone, only not connected to anything else. She folded it in half and set it aside on a dresser.

"Morning there, dear." she said as she sat on the bed he was sleeping on. "I thought you needed a rest, so I let you sleep in my home."

He looked around again and saw the book he was carrying all this time, though, and he gathered enough courage to move closer to get his book back.

"Oh, this is yours? Here." She gave the book to him, which he took into his arms. He smiled and nodded in thanks. He can smell her presence on her book and by her closeness, a welcoming mix of spices and sweetness.

"Oh, you're cute fox suit is in the wash. It was somewhat dirty, not to mention feeling

1 Link to a Pop-Up window defining the term. "Otaku, *n*, *Anime Term*, Fan of anything of a level bordering or passing obsession.

2 Link to a link list on Wendy's Nanny businesses, including references from other nannies from England and a pic with Wendy and the stars of Fox's "Nanny 911"

like it was something else. A Santa Claus suit perhaps. I'll let you have it back when it's clean, and what you have on now is the only thing I have around me that fits you. I hope you don't mind that until I get you something better?"

She smiled as she said that, a smile that was infectious to the boy, who smiled back.

"Good. By the way, you're even cuter without that hot fur coat anyway," she said as she rubbed his reddish hair, "that was all you had on when we found you. I think I can find something better for you here in Vegas' hot sun, but first, I think I should feed you breakfast. You must be hungry, er . . . Oh, I'm so sorry, I don't think I've gotten your name."

The child thought for a second.

And another second.

It took him a while.

A grumbling stomach brought a name to his mouth: "Ah . . . Adam. Ah think."

"You think?"

He looked down, his face red with embarrassment. "Ah . . . ah c-can't re . . . member."

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled PeterPanFetish

I've came across a lot of Otaku Groups in my time here, and I must admit that the most open-minded one of the lot has to be Disney Fans. Uncle Walt made so many cartoons appealing to so many groups that the Fandom on a whole is pretty much a big tent. Broad and Welcoming to even the most eclectic of fans. Granted, there are exceptions (<cough> Rescue Rangers </cough>), but each of the sub-groups in this fandom are very friendly to each other. Compare that to something like, say, Pretty Warrior Sailor Moon, where the Negaverse doesn't have to worry about destroying the world; the Moonies can pretty much do that by their own without any help, thank you so much.

Like I said earlier, my mother's favorite is Peter Pan, and she could be a certifiable nut for the flying boy. She converted parts of her home into a shrine with all the stuff she collected. And I think there's a Tinkerbell statue where the Virgin Mary should be in the front yard. (If she claims that Jesus Christ came from a Pixie, I wouldn't be surprised.)

She'd even go as far as dressing me up in those Green Tights and add me to her collection.

Not that I'd mind, anyway. (See the entry on [AdamAsPan](#))

"I've found an ID card of some sort with 'Adam Packbell' written on it, so I've just assumed that's your name. But since you remember the Adam part, I'm glad I didn't

screw that up.”

Adam grunted a ‘uh-huh’ as he lifted the bowl to drink down the milk from his third bowl of cereal. Most British people would have disapproved of that lack of etiquette, but not this woman.

“Small wonder you were so light when I carried you home, Adam. You must’ve been famished. Need another bowl, dear?”

He shook his head. “uh-uh . . . ah’m full, m-ma’am.”

“Please, call me Wendy,” she said as she received the bowl from Adam. “No, honesty, that *is* my name. It’s not because I’ve fallen in love with this little guy here.” She picked up a plastic figurine of Peter Pan—the pointy-eared boy who was dressed exactly like what Adam had on—and made flying noises as she hovered it around.

It made Adam chuckle when she did that. It was as infectious as Wendy’s smile.

“I was named after my great-grandmother, who was in the right time and place to be the Wendy in the Peter Pan story. Been fan of the classic my whole life because of that. Even a marriage of a fine gentleman and my immigrating to America couldn’t change that. Even played as him in a school play, wearing the very Peter Pan costume you’re in now. Since I still remember the size of that costume, I’ll be able to get a change of more proper clothes this afternoon. I don’t think you’d want to go around downtown Las Vegas dressed up in that.”

He looked down to where he was wearing, and just shrugged.

“Or that Santa suit turned furry costume, either.”

Another chuckle.

“You probably don’t know where that came from or where you got it, either, so you?”

He thought for a few moments.

Until Wendy patted him on his head.

“Don’t worry about it, dear. I’m sure you’ll remember soon enough. I’ve heard that when people lose some memories, it takes time to find them again.”

His brow creased for a moment. He knew he forgotten some things. Make that a whole lot of things. Things that where important. Things that—

Wendy picked up Adam into her arms in a bear hug. He was only slightly heavier, thanks to the full stomach. He opened his eyes—it was only now that he was aware that he closed them tight—and looked up to Wendy’s soft face.

“It’s all right, child. I know you’ll remember one day. Until then, you can stay here. I’d like you to, if you want.”

He looked up at Wendy’s eyes, hearing her voice, and one again, how can he refuse her? He smiled and nodded.

Her face seemed to glow as she lifted him up above her head. It was almost as if he could float up there. “That’s great! You can be my answer to Peter! You even look like him!”

He blushed at that.

“Oh! Silly me.”

He was put back down to the floor so she’d be able to show him around her home. And his.

Wendy’s home was a mini-mansion. The main floor was cut into four quarters: A kitchen, dining room, living room, and a den which was used as an office. This floor had plenty of display cases for Wendy’s collection of cute souvenirs, figurines, dolls the occasional snow dome, and what not. There was even a stuffed bear sitting on the sofa.

The second floor had two full baths and several bed rooms. The master bedroom was her’s—as well as this Copper person—the all but one was empty. The occupied one contained what Wendy called her most prized part of her collection: What Adam first thought was a lifesized doll maid lying on the bed was in fact, according to Wendy, an android girl with fox ears and a brushy tail. “Her name’s Tara Kit, and she was given to me by Copper one day to keep me company. She’s recharging her batteries, so it’s best we let her sleep for a while.”

There was a top floor above the master room, which housed a smaller bath and a good sized bedroom. Adam liked this room the best and it was decided that the attic room would be his.

The rest of the morning was spent with Wendy showing off her collection, and even let him pick up some of them. He found the characters and figures rather familiar, and even knows the names to some like that red-headed mermaid or that black-eared mouse, but not knowing where he heard of them or even why unnerved him.

Wendy was unnerved by something else, as she kept an eye on him. She had to with that costume he’s on. That costume of hers—and now his—proved to make him all but silent on the soft carpet. What unnerved her was that phone call to Copper.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled CopperMystran:

You won’t think of Copper when you run through the list of World Famous magicians here in Vegas, in fact he’s in the D-List category. He probably picked it up as a hobby and liked being in tuxedos ever since, and I heard that he’s quite a romantic; Kelly Griffin would swoon over him. Even after the accident that took a grater to his face. Not that he was that scarred; there was a good one across his forehead and two across his left eye, but it wasn’t a face you’d like to see on broadcast television. He’s known to wear a mask in public to hide the scars, and he reminds people that the shock over his face does go away.

What he lacked in good looks, he made up for a good nature though. He’s a romantic to mom, and very friendly and approachable to me. Whenever he shows up, we usually go out together on various trips and outings; which at the time I’m writing this is an understandable case of making up for all the time he’s away. At least he writes a lot over where he’s been, and he travels the world.

What he does gets a bit fuzzy at times, but I know it's a combination of his 'hobby,' and his true vocation: Would you believe ProfessionalHypnotist? He even put a stage version of that into his act, I've heard.

But I think that it's some constant globetrotting research of some sort. I know this because when he shows up, Dad's got something new and exciting to show me. One day I might join him on one trip and find out where he gets this stuff, but I wonder if it's something I shouldn't know about, like how a teen girl gets their periods, ugh.

What Copper found out about Adam didn't surprise her, since she have heard about stories like Adam's every other month: An unpopular, overbullied and all-out shunned child gets pushed beyond his or her breaking point and runs away, commits suicide, or ends up as breaking news on the news channels. In Adam's case, he just ran full tilt into a blizzard and was never seen again.

It was the *when* of the story that unnerved her. And Copper as well. ". . . that happened Christmas Eve."

"Yes?"

"Nineteen Hundred and Eighty. AD."

She checked the date on the cel phone: It was barely a week after New Year's Day. The year was 1996.

"Wendy, dear, this happened fifteen years ago. And by your image from your camera phone, he hasn't aged a day."

Three questions ran through Wendy's mind as she remembered what her husband said while the time-lost child sat on the floor in front of her with a Rubik's Cube: One, where has this guy been since 1980; Two, how did he end up here in 1995 Las Vegas without aging one day; and Three, what should she do with him?

The first question had one answer that went back and fourth from her mind. Outside of Alien abduction, she could think of only one place he can be where he can spend 15 years without growing any older, but to the general population, Neverland was a part of a Disney movie. Even if he was indeed there, and there was something in her heart that believes this to be true—Adam even dressed the part with that costume he had on—she knows that she's going to need more than the proverbial 'Faith Trust and Pixie Dust,' to convince the general public, as well as herself with 100% certainty, of the theory that part in her own heart knew was true: That Adam Packbell was one of Peter Pan's Lost Boys, and lived in Neverland all this time.

Of course, even if that was the answer to Question #1, it wouldn't answer Question #2. Adam's memories were a jumble. He had probably hit his head or something and got amnesia, poor thing. And Wendy was the first one to find him. If the question of how Adam fell into her lap is ever going to be answered, it would have to wait until Adam himself finds the missing part of his memories that has the answer.

However, the third question was, to Wendy's relief, very much cut and dry. Wherever Adam once called his hometown, it doesn't matter. To that town, Adam Packbell died

Christmas Eve 1980. Wherever he's been, she has neither the knowledge nor the ability to send him back. And she was not intending to take him to any child services center. In fact, before Copper could do any research on the child's name, she insisted in filing adoption papers. Nobody wanted this child she found, so that would make him hers. As quirky as she is, Wendy Mystran is known as a local Super-Nanny. She's certain that she can raise Adam better than any institution.

The only problem with Question #3 would be how to insure that the child would bond with her, to think of her as her mother. That's was when she was pulling out a crystal candle holder and lighting the candle inside. She remembers how she met Copper, and how she dated, and how he does what he did with his voice and touch.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled ProfessionalHypnotist

I must admit that I don't know a lot about this subject, and part of me actually doesn't want to. If you want to know more, ask my Dad or Surf the Web¹.

All I know is that I'd be with my parents, either by their side or on their lap or some other close place, and I'll be taken to this place where all is quiet, warm, safe, and magic. I don't know how I can describe it other than that. All I'll know is that I was loved and happy while under that spell.

Being loved and happy. That's so rare in this world.

She strained her ears to get a bearing of Adam as she does this. The clank of the just-solved Rubik's Cube on the ledge on a shelf announced that he's still in the room. Wendy would raise an eyebrow on the puzzle cube later; she'd never gotten past one side.

“Not much of a talker, aren’t you?”

Adam's voice was small and near a whisper. “A-ah don’t tawk g-good.”

“Indeed!” Wendy turned around to face him, face showing mock indignation. “I can understand you perfectly fine. Just because you have a backwoods accent doesn’t mean you don’t talk good. I was raised in London, England, and I must say that my voice comes off more funny than yours.”

She patted Adam as he fidgeted, scuffed his hair a bit. “You’re accent’s just find, child. To think that’s a speech impediment.” She guided him over to a chair and sat him down there, the combination of he soft touch, gentle voice, and eye contact started to siphon the tension away. “It’s all right, Adam. You’re with friends now. You’ve come to my home after a long and hard journey, and as you take a deep breath now, you can feel all that tension from your trip in that small body of yours, and you hold that breath for a moment, and then slowly exhale letting out that tension with your breath. Thats’ right. Nice and

¹ Link goes to Copper Mystran's Web Site, which contains more extensive material on this subject.

slow.”

Adam found himself breathing in and out with Wendy’s words, a slow inhale, holding it, gathering a bit of the stress with him, and the sensation of the tension going out with the slow exhale. This happened for about five or six breaths, and Adam found himself more relaxed, more at ease, as Wendy moved closer to Adam and held the child’s shoulders.

“Feeling better, Adam? You certainly look like you do.”

Adam nodded.

“That’s good. You needed it after the long trip you made. You’ve been through a lot, have you?”

Adam broke away for a moment. He searched what little memories he had at the time, his brow furrowed. What’s wrong with his memories?

“You don’t remember.”

He closed his eyes, shook his head.

“You must have lost your memories somehow. I’m very sorry to have this happen to you.”

Adam’s voice was somewhat better. “Ah...ah know i-it must’b-be a long tahm.” His eyes were still closed tight.

Wendy cupped his hand under Adam’s chin, and the child’s eyes reopened and returned to her eyes. “I know it’s a hard time for you, but you won’t be alone anymore. You’re staying with me now. We’ll be like a family.”

Of course they are. Why should they not be? Wendy told the truth, after all. He was indeed lost and alone in a strange land, and she took them in and cared for him, the first and possibly the only ones that will. Of course he’ll stay. He settled into Wendy’s welcome and comfortable chair and saw the candle holder she held.

“That’s right, child. Take a deep breath. Let your body relax. Let it out. Slow. That’s right. Let your eyes fall here, on my candle. You can see it sparkle in it’s holder, can you? Yes, it is. Your eyes are drawn to them. That’s it. Take a deep breath. Let your limbs go limp. Let it out. Slow. Relaxed. That’s it.”

Indeed, Adam can see that candle sparkle from inside it’s crystal holder, or maybe he’s imagining it, but he can’t pull away from them even if he could try. Everything around them and that sparkling seemed to fade away in a haze, even Wendy’s voice seemed to grow softer, until they were just noises in his ears. His eyes grew heavy as the limp, relaxed feeling spread into his body and up to his head, still trying to keep their gaze on that sparkle.

Wendy’s face smiled as Adam’s own slackened. Copper was right; Children are always easy to hypnotize, and Adam was no exception. Just how far Wendy can take Adam is still a guess however, and it depends on how good his imagination still is with the tests she has planned.

“That’s right, my child. You’ve traveled long and far to come here. You’ve traveled long and far to us and you, my child, must be very tired. You need to relax and release all that

tension from your trip now that you've finally arrived. You've finally arrived to my home and you need to rest, to empty your body and mind of that trip. Take a deep breath. That's right, child. Let it out. Soon your eyes will close and your mind will be empty and asleep. You can't help but fall into a deep, deep, restful sleep. Sound and safe. You can't help but drift off to sleep, child . . .”

When Adam's eyes fluttered closed, it was as if the bottom fell out from under him, letting him slip...no, he fell...into an even deeper and dreamy state. The initial shock of the drop shook all over his body, causing his eyes to flutter open for an instant, but nothing registered in his mind by the time the eyes closed once again. He felt himself sink into a warm, dark, quiet and very blissful sleep. Adam really did feel safe here, in this dark place, filled with hearth and warmth and home. It all seemed to flow all over his body, gently pulling him even deeper into that soft dark slumber . . .

“Good boy, Adam,” Wendy tells the entranced child as he brushes the hair from his relaxed forehead. “You're deeply asleep and your mind is empty. You are far away from your past, and you can't think of it anymore. That's okay, child, you're with me, my child; safer now than you have ever been. You are here in a new world, Adam. A world of light and love and happiness. A world where you can heal, and grow . . .”

The boy sighed as he slumped into the soft chair, his mind as far away and sinking into a white milky fog. Does he know what is happening to him? He doesn't quite know, but in time he doesn't care either. Every running thought in his head eluded him, going farther and Mother away into the fog, and Adam doubted that he wanted to go out and chase them anymore. He just wants to sit here and dream, and listen to Wendy's lovely voice.

Wendy blew the candle out, it served its purpose, and placed it on a felt sheet so it won't make a sound. “. . . and now you hear nothing but my voice, see nothing though your heavy eyes and I will pull you deeper and deeper now Adam and you want it, you want so much to fall deeper and deeper into my magic spell, yes, give up all control to my voice, let it move you, obey everything you hear, Adam . . . You do so want this, do you, child?”

What Adam said in his entranced stupor surprised Wendy. . . “yes, mama.”

“Mama now? Even in this deep trance you know will do deeper. You think of me more like your Mother, now, do you my child?”

“yes mama.”

“You think of me being your Mother, now, as I bring you deeper into my magic spell, and you want that more than you've ever wanted anything, more and more you'll find that wonderful feeling of being my beloved and obedient son. You do want that, my child. You do want to be my son, happy beloved, and loyal to me, your Mother.”

Adam listened to that repetition for about a couple minutes before he spoke again. “yes . . . Mother.”

Wendy had to smile. This was going better than she thought. “Yes, that's right, my son. I am now your Mother, my beloved son, and soon you will know me as nothing other than such. And you slip deeper and deeper into my loving spell, as a child does to his true parent. Feel my wisdom, and tenderness, know my love and pride, my son.”

Adam sighed another ‘ . . . mama . . . ‘ as a joy he haven’t known of before overfilled him. He’s a son now, a son to a Mother who is actually proud of him. Who is approving of him and what he does and who he is.

Wendy, who is now known as Mother to Adam, felt some tears come from her eyes. As she wiped them away, she thought that Adam is ready . . .

“And now you will forget everything but this, my son, as I begin to cast a spell to make you a magical being, and you want that more than you’ve ever wanted anything, more and more you’ll find that wonderful feeling of my magic going through your ears and your very being. And your voice will answer automatically now, as you hear it say the number ‘ten.’

An almost inaudible sigh: “..tennn..”

“And counting down...down..downnn to twenty...”

“llevennn... twelvvve.... “ his soft voice droned.

“And keep talking as you follow my next commands. That’s a good son, ‘thirteen . . . ‘ and each count makes you understand that you want only to soak up everything I say ‘fourteen,’ that’s a good boy, how much my words will become your own thoughts ‘fifteen’ . . . And my voice are becoming irresistible to you now ‘sixteen’ . . . they’ve always been irresistible to you, you only feel happy and warm ‘seven . . . teen’ as you become my son, and how easy it is for you to be my son. And how easy it is for you to be a good son.

“Let’s prove my unbreakable magic as your Mother now, Adam, feels sooo gooood to feel it. You will count to one hundred, deepening more and more all the way, and soon you will not be able to remember the correct numbers, no, you will try hard to remember, but you will forget, and you will be surprised to hear that every number has turned into words of magic and love, and that phrase is embedded completely within you and it is this: ‘You are my Mother, and I am your child’ and begin counting now, and try to remember all these numbers very well.”

Again the muffled murmuring. “One . . . two . . . three...” As Wendy guessed beside his teasing, he didn’t get past the teens. “Fourteen, f- fifteen, six... seven... sixteen... uhhhmhhh three, four... nnnnine... threeee... “

Wendy leaned closer to her child’s ear. “Yes, you just can’t remember, too hard to remember, the numbers become that special phrase...”

“...five...my...nine...your child...three..my Mother...and i am...your child... you are...my Mother...and I am...your child...” He repeated this litany until his voice was like that of when he was awake and talking softly: “You are...my Mother...and I am...your child...You are...my Mother...and I am...your child...You are...my Mother...”

While Adam was chanting Wendy found a pair of plastic bands, the kind of colored bands kids are known to wear. When she was ready, she returned to her son’s receptive ear.

“You can stop now, my son. Let your voice trail off to silence. Breathe deeply and fully.”

“You are . . . my Mother . . . and i . . . am . . . ” The boy quieted down.

“Now you can hear and obey me completely, my son. You can remember the numbers, all

the numbers again. While you count to one hundred I will speak to you, still casting my magic deep inside you. Keep counting, child."

"One . . . two . . . three . . ."

"As you continue counting, in a steady beat of numbers that just flow out of your mouth, you will feel my magic go into your wrists and hands. I am giving you magic hands now, child. They will feel warm and comfortable as they are worn, feel them as I put them on you, you will find them to be feel very good as they slide over your hands."

"fourteen . . . fivvteen . . . sixxteen . . . sevvnteen . . ."

Starting with the left arm and then with the other, she pulled those plastic bands over the child's unresisting hands. As he does so, the child kept going at his count: "thurdyfivvv . . . thurdysix . . . thurdysevvn . . ."

Now with Adam's wrists were bound by those plastic bands, and Wendy settled the limp appendages by his sides without feeling the slightest response.

He was near the fifties now.

"Count slowly now, my son," Wendy said, stroking the boy's nose as he spoke. "Slowly. Enjoy the sound of the 'fff' as you count."

Obediently the child voice came: "fffffffftyonnnnee . . . fffffftytwoooo . . ." Wendy smiled a bit to enjoy his work, what was once a cautious and frightenable child was now a happy and pliable son, entranced in his Mother's arms, "fffffffftyyyfffffourrrrr . . ."

"My dear beloved Adam," Wendy murmured,

"fffffffftyyyfffffiiiffffe . . ."

"When you reach sixty I will slowly turn on the magic. Your wrists are now full of magic, and they float as they show their magic, like helium balloons, and as you hear your voice approach sixty the magic will become greater and greater... you are completely unable to move your heavy, sleepy arms and wrists, completely unable to move them, not even a finger, not even the slightest bit by yourself, but the magic will pull up and up on your magic hands, up into the air towards the power. Relax and enjoy the feeling as I control your arms with my powerful magic..."

The child progressed on to the sixties: "sixtyyy . . . sixtyyy one . . . sixtyyy twoooo . . . sixtyyy threeee . . ." and, as if he were a marionette tied at the wrists, his dangling, limp arms now jiggled and jerked slightly and began to lift up off his lap. In a moment they were raised straight up in the air.

"Feels wonderful to have the magic taking over you... you know you want much much more, Adam, you want it more and more as you forget the numbers once again, replaced by my magic phrase."

There was another deep sigh from the child. "sixtyy . . . nine . . . seven . . . seven . . . one . . . my Mother . . . and I am . . . your child . . . you are my . . . Mother . . ."

"And now as I count from five to one, the magic grows weaker, and your heavy arms . . . so heavy, so limp and soft . . . will be able to sink deeply down again. 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1, and you sink still deeper . . ."

Deeper into Mother's Voice.

Deeper into Mother's Arms.

Deeper into Mother's Love.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled TaraKit:

Tara Kit is short for EDS-USP2-TK; Emotional Doll System, made in the United States, Prototype model, serial number 2, and her initials. Emotional Dolls like Tara are androids with the ability to develop relationships with their Users as they interact with them. They are a new rage in Japan, where fans of dating sims can import their saved games into their own Emotional Dolls and have them develop a composite personality, at times so lifelike that some of these otaku even go steady and even marry their androids. They resemble cute looking girls with additional furry features like additional ears and a tail. In Tara's case, it's the ears and tail of a fox.

While some droids made it out into the public, almost all of them resemble those little beeping scooting boxes you'd see Chewy scare away in Episode 4. And I do know of some owning an Earth version of an R2 type, and that the military and some law enforcement groups are beefing up their ranks with those cool looking TachikomaSpyders¹—I know of a friend who wants one himself. However, everyone I know consider EDS droids rather creepy. It's probably regional in nature. Americans just don't consider it okay for someone to shack with what is in all intents and purposes a Shepherd Wife.

However, there are other purposes for having an EDS around, which is why local robotics company NeoGizmoTech is developing this US version. Not only can they act out Princess Maker, but they also make great house maids who help out around the home, and Mom would never be able to keep her appointments and phone numbers without her. After I showed up, she got an additional function of being an extra set of eyes and ears to keep watch after me. And I must admit, I'd like having her as a babysitter.

And yes, you perverts, you can actually screw them. In fact, EDS-USP1-AR is a robotic version of a textbook Playboy Bunny, complete with the ears, tail, costume, and disposition. Someone in NeoGizmoTech must've been too lonely for his own good.

A passive and inert Tara Kit, still laid at her bed. Her maid dress was still as perfect as it was when she laid down since she doesn't as much as fidget in her 'off' mode. The long dark blue skirt was thick enough not to show where her legs were, spread apart and separated by her tail, which had on simple ankle socks and shoes. The white frilly apron

¹ Links goes to the official Spyder site of the Tachikoma company. Spiders resemble in both form and function like the Tachikoma tanks in the anime series *Ghost in the Shell*, to which the company honors with its name.

went around her waist and up to the shoulders of her long sleeves, further covering what could be electronic devices or a likable figure. Her strawberry blond hair was still as perfect, bound back in an equally frilly white hairband.

Her eyes went from closed to fully open with a click. Her back was a bit too rigid, but all five of her limbs were still and inert and her head still didn't move. Her face was a frozen smile with eyes that stared off into space. Her current doll-like resemblance wasn't helped much with her monotone voice.

energy levels at full . . . recharge system disengaged . . . kernel ok . . . motor systems ok . . . internal circuitry ok . . . hard disk memory optimized at 80% free . . . all systems green . . . unit EDS-USP2-TK ready for operation . . . accessing parameter menu . . . relaying to networked machine mystrantara . . .

Tara had a USB cable connected behind one of the side locks of her hair, which lead to the small desktop computer set in a lamppost. The monitor showed a list of what Tara assumes are her users and what she is to them.

On top of that list is Wendy, who is given the label of "Alpha User," whom Tara'll serve the most purpose with. Having his in her programming makes for a contented and even happy android. Yes, her programming does allow her some limited emotions. It took Wendy some time for her to warm up to her, but Tara proved to be very valuable to her in time. Not only does she help out around the house, she also serves as Wendy's PDA, keeping track of her addresses, phone numbers, dates and appointments, dictating notes and letters, storing recopies and household tips, and in general being the Mystran's Girl Friday and her pride and joy among her collection. If she could at this point of time, Tara would wonder what Wendy would think of her emotions.

Of course, Tara wasn't capable to think about such things. Or think at all. She wasn't able to. Her personality programming was still inactive and she just laid there inert as a second user was put into her memory: His name was Adam Packbell. She'd think of the image of him that was transferred to her memories as that of a rather handsome child. The selections made remade her thoughts and created her connection toward him. Adam would be Tara's kid brother of sorts, and she will be very fond of him. She is to accompany the child and keep tabs of him when Copper or Wendy are away. Her emotion chips were ready to generate the highest levels of fondness and affection toward the child, and she is to do anything within her ability to keep him safe and in a general state of well-being. She would want him to be happy, and to have his life and world to be just as.

She wouldn't even notice the change in her programming and personality—the change in who she is—even after the programming screen is clicked off and a switch is moved back to "Active Mode," returning her systems to their normal state of robotic living. She couldn't. She is after all a robot. Someone who does what she's programmed. Even if that programming can be self-adjusted over time.

Life appears in Tara's eyes with a start, her face brightens, her arms move in front of her chest, her legs bend in place. By the time she stood up from her bed and detached the USB cord from where it stuck on her head, her movements were smooth and natural-looking. Even her tail had the side-to-side wag.

Tara's triangular ears pivoted around for signs of life in the house. She found the soft feminine voice of Wendy and followed it. She noted that she was talking to someone she is very fond of, and assumed that it was Adam.

“ . . . and know that I will love and care for you with all I am and that I am proud to have you as my son. You will never be lost and alone ever again.”

Tara found Wendy with the dreaming Adam in her arms. She had to smile at what Adam was wearing. It suits him with the kind of mother he has.

She settled down next to Wendy and looked on at the entranced Adam. She found herself sighing in affection as she felt her programmed in emotions toward him register. Tara Kit wouldn't claim that she has an imagination, she is after all an android. But she can actually see herself with him. Playing games, going out of adventures, sharing good times. Recharging with his sleeping body in her arms. Being happy. That's what she wants for Adam. That's what she wants for him for as long as she lived.

“I want you to be happy, Adam” Wendy said as she stroked his head. “I want this life and world to be happy, and I'll help you make this life a happy one. I'll be here with you for as long as I live. You'll never have to be in that sad lonely world anymore. I will love you with all of my being.”

Her voice was down to a soft whisper as she moved over to his ear to say, “I will love you, Adam Packbell, for all eternity.” She then gently presses her lips against his and offers him a very warm and long kiss.

Adam's eyes flutter as he feels his lips cradled by Mother's, and his eyes slowly open, awake, though still enchanted by that magical dream. He pulls up to her, embraced her with his arms, set his chin over her shoulder . . . and felt something wet and peculiar.

“I know you're happy to have me, Mom, but why are you crying?”

Wendy had to laugh at that, and so did Tara, although for a different reason. She always was fascinated by the complexity of the human experience.

Adam heard Tara's amused giggle and turned around to see who it was. The Foxgirl robot was up and about, and giving him a cute smile. “Hello there, Adam,” she said in a cheerful voice. “You're kinda cute.”

“Tara, girl,” Wendy said, “Had a nice recharge?”

“I have.” Tara said with a nod.

“That's good to hear. I'm going to need you to look after Adam here while I go buy some clothes for him. As much as I want to, he can only play Peter Pan at certain times.”

She passed Adam to Tara's arms. Adam was surprised as to how soft and silky her body felt, not the metal he'd expect when he heard that she's a robot. She even smelled of bubble gum.

“Of course, Wendy. I hope to get to know your son better.”

“Be careful, Mama. I hope you won't be gone long.”

“Oh, I'll be back in a couple hours, Adam,” Wendy said as she kissed him again on the forehead.

And then she went out the door and toward her car with a shopping list of clothes, food and snacks, small playthings, hygiene products . . .

“Is there any books in here, Tara?”

. . . and some books for the lucky child.

Chapter 03

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled IdentificationCard:

[Included is a scanned image of Adam's current ID, with the following text: Nevada State ID; the ID card's serial number; Issued 01-03-96, Expires 12-25-00; The mailing address of "Adam Packbell, C/O Mystran Residence, 14 Great Ormand Street Box #2, Las Vegas NV 89109"; Birthdate 12-25-85, Male, 4 feet even and 90 lbs; Brown Eyes, Red Brown Hair, and no restrictions other than the "Under 21" and "Not Driving License" parts.]

This is the first clue over where what happened to me: That number on the Weight is just a suggestion. When I stepped on the scale, it didn't go past 30. Mom said that I'm light on my feet, but light enough not to show on the scale?

The doctor is just as puzzled as I am, because we both know I eat well enough. Just ask Mom and Dad; their food bill doubled thanks to me. The doc could only note that it could be another example of the wave of GeneticMutations¹ flying about town, especially here in Vegas thanks to all those atomic tests that occurred nearby during the 40s. So he took a blood sample (Ugh, bleeding into a tube is *gross!!*) and sent me on my way.

Side note to my Mother: It's a good thing that Wendy informed this to Child Protective Services. It was only a matter of time before SacheHawkins finds this out and tries to sic them on me. Many times over!

"You have got to be the most lucky kid on Earth," the DMV clerk said as she busies herself with the forms needed to create a new Identification Card for Adam. "Last night, you didn't have a record to your name, much less an identity, and now you have every record available for you to function here. Birth Certificates, Adoption Records, SSI Numbers, it's all here, and all dated yesterday."

"Seems that you now have a decent family that wasn't there before, eh?" She said as she handed Adam his ID. Not only did she shake her head at him, but her flat, stern voice gave Adam the impression that his presence is better put elsewhere. "Not too many runaways wake up one day to a new family. Don't screw this up, you hear? NEXT!"

Even if he wasn't this shy toward strangers Adam would have taken the ID and bailed from the room before he got another one of those looks from that clerk.

He went out the office and in the hall, found Tara sitting on a bench with her eyes closed, and sat down next to her, a bit too still which just screamed out "Android conserving her batteries in public!" but a pointed fox ear twitched toward Adam when he sat down.

She opened the eye near to Adam and smiled. "Got your ID?"

¹ Link to a page with a list of Web Sites on Genetic Mutations.

He nodded.

“Wendy’ll be back here when she gets done. She needs to get her signature on some forms, and there’s a long line in front of her.”

“Bummer.”

She just shrugged, and closed her eyes again.

Adam just sat there, on the bench, looking at his shoes, reached back for his bookbag and his copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

And then another pair of shoes entered his field of vision, about his size.

“Hi there,” a chipper and girlish voice sang out toward him.

He looked up. It was a girl about his age, wearing bell bottom jeans, a half-length shirt, and a vest. Her red hair was tied back with a bow into twin tails but the bangs still managed to fall a bit in front of her eyes.

“You’re must be Wendy’s new son she’s crowing about all over Vegas today. Adam, right?”

Adam nodded, as did Tara who woke back up again. “What brings you here, Vixen?”

“Oh, my dad’s filing some announcements about local native stuff.”

“Ah,” Tara nods. “You can sit here if you wish.”

“He doesn’t mind?”

He shook his had and scooted over to give the girl room.

“Thanks, Adam,” she said as she sat down. “I heard that you’ve lost your memory too.”

“Hmmm?” Adam’s curiosity overcame his shyness at this point.

“Yeah, sucks ain’t it? I just woke up one day under someone who looks like a cross between a Native American and an Woodland Elf. His name’s Elrohir Telemar. Strange name for an ‘Indian’...” She made the quote marks with her fingers. “...but who’s complaining? He said that he found me lost in the desert after I fell down and bumped my head on some rock. I had to take his word for it; I didn’t even know my name. He took me in and called me ‘Vixen’ because of my hair.”

“Something tells me that I should be grateful of having a name tag on me when I was found.”

“Yeah,” Vixen said with a chuckle. “You would have been named after Wendy’s hero. But then again, you do look like him.”

Adam blushed. And then he smiled. “Yeah, I’d guess.”

“Maybe we should grab a soda, Think your mom’d mind?”

“Not at all,” Tara said, “I’ll page her and accompany you.”

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled VixenTelemar:

She's the first friend I made in Vegas. No doubt saw this bored kid sitting on the bench and thought about sitting next to him. We're now practically an item. I'm going to end up married to this woman, I know it.

I think it's because that we've got similar origins. She lost her memory because she fell on her head. She also don't know what happened to her parents before this event, but was real glad ElrohirTelemar¹ was able to pick up her cries with those pointed ears of his. Saved her young life and raised her as his daughter. What a pair they'd make: Native American Elf with a Caucasian kid.

While she doesn't dress like a Native, she has learned one native skill: The ability to speak with other animals, including her constant red fox companion, Todd. When she started to get into puberty a year later—trust me, you don't want the sordid details. Let's just say I don't envy you girls—this ability was so enhanced that she's fluent in 50 species. She wants to work in a zoo when she grows up.

Of course, when she's not hanging on my arm. I have got to admit that I have mixed feelings when Vix gets all over me. I'm at the part where I don't mind at all having a girl all over me, but man, there's such a thing as cooties, you know.

Something tells me that thing causing the ring which I'll put in my wallet someday's going to be *needed*.

As Tara was standing up to walk with the two kids, Wendy felt a rumble in her hip. It was her cel phone going off. She flipped open and read what was on the screen. She then turned to a man who indeed looked like a Native American with elven ears. “Looks like your daughter just found my son.”

Elrohir was dressed Southwestern Casual. “I'm not surprised. Vixen makes friends very easily.”

“I know, I've been keeping an eye on her with you. In fact, it's the reason behind me renewing this blooming license. To think that you'd need to register with City Hall to be a professional nanny.”

“You know why by now Wendy, it's all those hidden camera exposes that make the news. and that's not counting the one you were in.”

“So I found that nanny cam and played with it just like it was a normal digicam. At least I commented how good parents they were.”

As Wendy was saying that, she was looking out of the window to find a rather handsome red-furred fox just sitting there in the desert yard. A bit out of place, since most of the foxes in Nevada were of the Fennec variety. No matter though, since foxes are as

¹ Link to a page on Vixen's Father, with a paragraph each on Elrohir's Native American heritage and his Elvish Gene, a recent mutation of human DNA which results in appearance and heightened senses similar to the Elves from the “Lord of the Rings” Trilogy.

omnivorous as they are opportunistic; they can survive in any rural environment if there was enough garbage cans to raid or kids to charm.

Such as that redhaired girl that fox bounded to, his tail wagging.

“Here, Todd, c’mon boy,” Vixen said as she saw the ball of fur race up to her, barking out in a high-pitched “Kon! Kon!” and in one leap pounced into her arms. She giggled as the fox nuzzled up to her shoulder and licked her face.

“That fox must know you,” Adam said.

“Sure does, when my Dad found me, he had Todd here as a cub, and he let me raise him. He even taught me how to talk to him. Watch this.”

Todd’s closest ear perked up as Vixen murred some noises into his ear. Adam didn’t know what it was about, but the fox looked over at the strange boy next to Vixen, and back at Vixen. The fox let out a “Merf” of a growl, wondering what to think of him.

Adam did the one thing he knew of if he saw an animal that wasn’t growling or barking at him at the time: He stuck his hand in front of him, palm up, for the critter to sniff.

Todd did so, at Vixen’s purring request. He was cautious at first, his nose poking out toward Adam’s offered hand, his pronounced sniffs taking in the boy’s scent. The fox then brushes his face up against the hand, as if coaxing the hand to pet him. This happened for a few seconds until, with a sudden leap, Todd jumped from Vixen’s shoulder to Adam’s

Adam laughed as the fox snuggled up to him, and did the lick-kiss that he gave Vixen.

“He likes you now. Todd always clears any friends for me, he’s very protective.”

Adam ‘heh’s as Todd sniffs around, attracted to a scent in Adam’s snack bag. Adam took out a chunk of beef jerky for the fox to nibble at from his hand.

“But then there’s always bribery,” Vixen said as she laughed.

The sight of the beef jerky caused Vixen’s stomach to rumble, as well as Adam’s, so they decided to go grab some lunch themselves, with the robotic Foxgirl following along.

It would be Adam’s first view of the Las Vegas Strip, memory or not. Not that it mattered, the towering and elaborate casinos, hotels, signs, and various other architecture left Adam in sheer awe. Was that an Egyptian pyramid next to a Medieval Castle? The Statue of Liberty and the Tower of Paris sharing the same city block! And over there: A volcano! And a Pirate Ship! A fountain that seemed to dance to it’s own soundtrack! Any one of them may be a wonder to behold, but this is one right after another in a wonder-filled amusement park that just goes on and on.

“If you think this is awesome, wait til you should see it in night,” Vixen said, as she watches Adam look out the monorail window slack-jawed. “That’s when they turn on the lights. You’ll be surprised if you’d ever find the chance to sleep. I know I had. If I had a buck for each time the cops picked me up dozing under the light tunnel at Fremont Street...”

“Light tunnel?”

“Be glad you’re going to be living here. It’s going to take all your time until you’re 21 to take all of Vegas in. And then you can go in the casinos, but that’s too far ahead of myself. Check out that roller coaster!”

The Manhattan Express became Adam’s first major memory of Vegas. Vixen found out that he would, like her, enjoy riding roller coasters, as he was thrilled to the twisting turns of this steelie. Almost all the time his arms were even up, almost like he was flying through the track.

By the time Wendy caught up with the pair—guided by the signal from their ever-following Tara—Adam was enjoying his re-introduction to normal everyday life, or at the very least, what counts as “normal everyday life” in Vegas. And Vixen was showing him one of the perks of knowing the city like the back of her hand: She knows where the 99¢ two-foot hot dogs are.

While Wendy got one for herself and joined the two children, Adam stole a look over to the side and found out what a slot machine is like.

And blinked in disbelief as someone blew a twenty dollar bill in just as few seconds right before his eyes.

“And they’d tell you two not to spend your allowance in once place,” Wendy said with her nose upturned.

“At least at the arcades twenty bucks lasts longer,” Vixen added.

“The arcade?”

Vixen was right about Arcades: Just as colorful and noisy as the adults-only casinos, but the games lasts much longer for just a few quarters at a time. And according to her, Adam can expect at least two or three of these arcades in each of these Casinos.

Adam was distracted once again, this time by the variety of games. However, this is something Adam was getting quite used to by now. “It’s Vegas,” he’s been told, “Everything in Vegas is more than what you can take in all at once.”

Vixen thought it would be a good idea to pick the first game, and so she showed him her favorite of favorites in arcade games: Dance Dance Revolution. DDR, as it’s called by their initials, is a video jukebox with a pair of foot pad platforms connected to it. The video screen show a stream of arrows that correspond to the four arrow pads on the platform you’re sitting on. When the arrows reach the four stationary arrows on the top of the screen, you hit the corresponding arrow panel. If you do it right, the life bar above the four arrows grow, if you miss, it shrinks. If it shrinks to nothing, you lose the game.

Losing the game wasn’t much of a problem with the Adam and Vixen, who was playing it at the easiest setting. Adam learned how to play the game, and parts of the crowd noted his light footwork gliding over the arrow pads.

But then she noted someone walk up to the machine and started to tap on the selection

buttons that were on the jukebox and called up the option screen. “Let’s see how well you do with a challenge, dude.”

Vixen recognized the young man. “Take it easy on him, Victor. It’s his first time on DDR.”

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled VictorKalinski:

Victor Kalinski, also known as “Motorhead,” would have been among my friends sooner or later. He was one of my mother’s Nanny cases ever since she caught him in the alley smoking a joint. He was having trouble at a school who claimed that he was nothing but trouble.

He’s no longer a up and coming criminal, but he’s quite a hacker¹. He’s very interested in computers and electronics, and was the one who introduced me to the Internet. You can always find him tweaking this computer or adding 133t swag into that device. He might come off as a geek, but it keeps him out of trouble.

Adam looked over to who this Victor is. A slender dude in his mid teens, light brown hair, an ‘3V1L L33T’ T-shirt, and a likable chummy voice. “It’s all right, Vix. I just want to see how he’ll do.” He then tapped on the start button. “Don’t feel bad if you bomb the first time.”

The song began. ‘Sakura’ on the ‘Oni’ setting. One of the best known ‘hard’ songs on DDR.

Adam readied himself on the dance pad, focused on the screen. The surrounding lights and sounds faded away. He only heard the Japanese strings and the falling sakura petals waiting for the stream of arrows to show up. He feared the worst as it took a bit too long for it to show. In fact, the whole screen seemed to slow down as he waited for the stream to start.

He wasn’t disappointed. The almost too congested stream of arrows shot up almost too much. He panicked for a split second. And then his feet started to jump on the tiles. He could feel his body, his mind, himself, catch up with the speed of the streaming arrows.

The battle was joined between his light footwork and the jukebox set to challenge him. The life bar on the top of the screen was a tug of war. It dipped down and slowly crept back up, neither contestant in the battle giving in.

And just as it was about to last too long and Adam was about to lose it all, the arrow stream and the music stopped.

¹ Link to a pop-up definition: Hacker *n*, Computer and Electronic enthusiast who often seeks methods to improve on the devices they use, like adding additional Hard Drive space to a Tivo Player.

CLEARED!

The machine's congratulatory applause was met with the applause from behind him. The world once again visible and audible, as shouts of victory came from the onlookers.

"Not bad." Victor said, giving him a firm slap on the shoulder.

Adam was winded, and his legs were a bit too warm. He looked at the screen for the resulting grade: C

He turned to Victor and nodded. "Not bad for a first time. Need'ta recover from that."

The GAME OVER screen was shown anyway, so Adam thought it was time to step down and let someone else have some exercise.

He sat down by Vixen and Victor as the next player set the machine so he can use both pads at once.

"Way to go, dude!" Victor said giving Adam another slap on the back. "That was awesome."

"Th-thanks," Adam replied, giving him a weak smile.

"You've tried DDR before, haven't ya?"

Adam shook his head.

"You've *haven't*?"

At this point, Wendy's voice interrupted. "Motorhead, can you please come here after you're through joshing around with my son?"

Victor turned around to meet Adam's mother, face showing surprise. He then turned back to Adam.

"I'm Adam Packbell." He held out his hand.

"I'm sorry." He shook it.

"About what?"

"You have to put up with her twenty four seven." Victor pointed toward Wendy who was showing mock shock. "She'll be a great mom, but she can be a little weird at times, thanks to her Darling heritage."

"And the problem is?"

Victor blinked at this before Wendy tapped him on the shoulder. The two took some steps away.

"I need to tell you more about Adam, Vic."

"When did you adopt him, Wendy?"

"Yesterday. I've signed the papers this morning. I've found the poor bloke wandering the desert outside of town. When I took him into my home, I've found out that he has no family, home, records, even identity. He didn't have anywhere else to go and I don't know of anyone who'll take him, so I decided to keep him."

"Does he know who he is."

“That’s what I wanted to tell you about. He doesn’t remember anything before he showed up here.”

“Amnesia? Damn.”

Wendy raised an eyebrow.

“er, pardon my French.”

“You cussed in your main language, Victor. American English.”

“Pardon me just the same.”

Wendy chuckled. She was doing her own joshing. It was something she usually does when one of her charges swore. Not that she frowns on every instance; one of her rules is ‘Cussing has its place.’

“My point is that, when you take my son around and get him back up to speed, go easy on him, and that includes your limited vocabulary.”

“Right.”

“Now then, on a better issue. How has dumpster diving over at NeoGizmoTech caught for you?”

“I didn’t have to stoop that far, but I did find a new power system for Tara.” He then went on for a full minute of technical jargon and what not that Wendy wouldn’t understand until she made a grunt.

“In layman’s terms, Motorhead.”

“It should last twice as long as the standard system Tara has now. I can get it on a beta test program and put it in her tomorrow.”

“Excellent. You’re really getting into this high-tech stuff.”

“Well, that’s why I’ve gotten the nickname Motorhead.”

“Keeps you out of trouble, and that’s good.”

Victor’s face fell and he looked past Wendy. “...and speaking of trouble.”

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled NorthVegasHigh:

Note: This entry is a compilation of several entries here in this Wiki, including SacheHawkins, JoshHawkins, VictorKalinski, SacheVsWendy, and VegasCodfish.

Whenever I wonder about why things happened to me the way they happen, I only need to look at North Vegas High, and the reason always come back to me. I also remember the shudder I felt when I hear about school shooters, wondering if I should have been one of them.

If I had to “learn” in a place like North Vegas High, I would have. With all the harassment by the peers, the tyrannical dictatorship of the faculty, and the total apathy of

everyone else. How can you learn in a place where you have graffiti on every other wall saying that you “eat shit,” have insults, laughs, and foreign objects thrown at you with impunity, and fearing everyone a foot taller, a decade older, or both who's waiting for the slightest excuse to swat you to the point where you're reduced to a wailing baby?

That was my life in *grammer* school, and what probably set me running into the snow was somebody saying that it would be *worse* when I get to Junior High. If North Vegas High is an indication, I don't blame myself for running.

No High School Diploma is worth getting this kind of treatment, and as long as people are blind to this, they're going to keep seeing then in breaking news reports.

That's what's going to happen to North Vegas High, and I don't have to go there—thank God—to know it. Mom's got enough evidence to make her own casino, and can list a whole class of people, like Motorhead, who came in happy and bright at 8th grade, only to end up broken in sullen by 10th, more resembling POW victims than high school students.

And Victor still has flashbacks about Sache Hawkings, a man who runs his school with an iron fist (usually holding a Singapore Cane which he uses with impunity,) cheap suits, anger issues, bad breath, B.O., and tenure. And he flat out encourages an environment where the popular, athletic, and beautiful trump anything else, including anything in Academics above standardized tests. But when schools started to get shot up, he took Zero Tolerance and went into the Negatives, rounding up every last student who didn't fit into his image of popular—with his spoiled punk son Josh propped up as a standard—and reducing them into prisoners, forcing them to drop out by his extreme disciplinary practices or flat out expelling them at a drop of a hat. He'd even go as far as to force their families to move out of North Vegas, including using Eniment Domain to turn a home that was homeschooling several rejects into a Quick Trip.

These despotic practices is covered by a public image of a beleaguered high school principle in a high-crime area and a rule of order must be maintained there. Not too many people see through that disguise, even as a once proud school is turned into a gulag and half of the kids there are already considered criminals even though they don't have a record.

However, he's got a growing group of dissenters who consider him to be too strict to be an effective principal. One of the more visible is my mother, who made CNN one time by nearly knocking Sache out with an umbrella in response to him making a harassing Mary Poppins crack. (Idiot. Everyone knows she's a *Peter Pan* fan.)

It was here where he earned his nickname, because she said this loud enough to be heard all around the world: “And another thing: The next time you want to get into a fight with me, Hawkings, remember to bathe beforehand: *You smell like Codfish!!*”

That's right, folks, a Codfish. And it's only a matter of time before he and I come to blows. I only hope that I'll be ready by then.

Wendy didn't have to turn around to see who entered the arcade. Her nose was offended by the body odor. It was the scent of someone who spends all of his spare time exercising

and not worrying about showering afterwards. She smelled it before she heard the crowd noise grow silent and felt the hairs on the back of her neck which is made by someone giving you a dirty look.

Sache Hawkings, Principal of North Vegas Junior High, had that effect on people, especially kids. Wendy stole a look that was just as disapproving back at him, creating a drop in room temperature of a good ten degrees.

Wendy gave Sache a defiant look, enjoying the memories of dressing him down on 24-hour cable news channels, until Vixen's cry of "Get *away* from me!!" brought her back to reality.

Josh Hawkings found his way to Adam and Vixen's bench, shoved Adam to the floor, and began to make some moves toward another one of Wendy's charges. (For an instant, she thanked the Great Spirit that Vixen was found by Elrohir. Native American families are exempt from the public school system, including those with kids from other cultures.)

Wendy was about to take the two kids away from this Codfish in Training and get out of the casino without creating another incident.

Too late. Adam was tapping on Josh's shoulder.

"Get the fuck away from me, Boy" the muscle-headed Jacket Jock said without even turning around to face who he was taking to. He just got back to making his advancements on Vixen.

But not before Adam delivered a swift uppercut. Between the legs.

Even Vixen had to feel it: "oooooooo. Rick Flair style."

The Letterman turned around the best he could with his gonads protesting. He saw an enraged Adam Packbell. Eyes that were nearly glowing.

"Don't call me *boy*." Adam said, his voice a menacing sneer.

Adam wondered why the jock was smiling when a smelly, sweaty, and strong hand grabbed him from the back of the neck and slammed him to the floor.

The impact and the smell made him feel dizzy. He tried to kick away, but it only made the hand squeeze. He screamed.

"*I'LL CALL YOU WHATEVER I DAMN WELL WANT, BOY!!*"

He felt the hot and wet breath of a bearded mouth up against his neck as a voice cranked to eleven pierced his ears.

"WHAT DO YOU SAY TO MY SON?!"

"Let go of me!!"

That only made him press down hard.

"WHAT DO YOU SAY?!"

"LET GO OF ME!?"

Adam's head swam. He felt he was going to faint. His right hand had to work fast. It dug into his shorts, and found a mechanical pencil.

“WHAT DO YOU SAY TO ME!!”

A pencil that hand jams into that hand’s wrist!

“LET GO OF ME!!!”

The voice backed away, howling in range.

As Adam scrapped himself off the floor and turned to see who was trying to turn him into part of the New York New York architecture, he saw that the pain only made this black haired fiend who resembled too much like one of his mother’s stories all the more angrier.

“WAIT TIL I GET YOUR ASS IN MY SCHOOL, *BOY!*” Sache said, letting some spittle fly from his mouth to Adam’s face. When Adam tried to brush it off, it was grabbed by a hand was was several settings too tight and lifted up above his head. “YOU’VE GOT A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT--”

“About what, pray tell?”

Sache didn’t bother to look around. “I’ll talk to you in a moment Poppins. WHERE WAS I?”

Sache didn’t have time to get back to his place on teaching this Boy to learn his place.

“You’ll talk to me *now*, Codfish!!” Wendy said as she pulled Adam away with one hand and shoved Sache to the wall with the other. “Once you get your filthy hands off *my* son!”

Sache looked rather indignant, and his mind was just about to spit out a “ . . . what . . . did . . . you . . . just . . . call . . . me . . . you . . . ”, but then he noticed the stressed part of Wendy’s diatribe. “*Your* son?”

“That’s right, rotter, and I’d rather take a dip on the Thames then take my child to that Gulag hole you call a School.”

“It’s the *only* school for the kids in here that are declared ‘troubled’ by the School Board. Just like your son has become the moment he got on the database. Mine is the only school that will take punks like him!”

Sache took a moment to take a steely glance toward Adam, who shrank at his predatory expression.

Wendy was aghast over what is happening, and her gasp let everyone know it. Adam was only present in Vegas for two and a half days, and he’s already a “Problem Child” statistic? The Gall!

Sache didn’t even think about why this would cause such an response as he continued. “In fact, I’ve even sent you a Ritalin prescription for your son to take befo—”

He went too far.

The contact of Wendy’s hand to Sache’s face was heard all the way across the connected buildings of New York New York, even over the casino floors. Sache himself was sent reeling to the floor, an imprint of her hand emblazoned in bruise red.

It was definitely Wendy’s turn to be angered. She have had enough of Sache’s tempting

the fate of getting between her and her cub, and like a mother bear, she's not going to sit with that. "Tara, love, call up the forms needed to home school your kids, so I can fill them when I get home."

"At once, Wendy," Tara said.

Sache was snarling in anger as he gets up. Nobody should be allowed to do that to him, especially someone who had her education from a boarding home instead of a high school diploma. "Do you honestly think you can give your son a decent edu—"

"Even the brain-dead can give my son a better education than you, and they won't be needing Ritalin. And I'd rather keep my child at home than have him so stoned he can't move out of a chair. I've seen you screw up many a child in your school, I refuse to allow you to screw up my own child."

She then grabbed his collar, moved up to his face, and had to winkle her nose for the coup de grace. "Oh, and one more thing. If you so much as look at my son the wrong way again, I'll deep fry you and serve you with chips. Let's go, Adam. I need to wash the smell off me. Good God, Sir! Do you wash your hands in an aquarium?!"

Wendy took Adam by the hand and out of the Arcade, while Sache was now yelling in top volume and even following them until a security guard stopped him. Adam didn't hear all of what Sache screamed about, but he could tell he was aiming his anger at him, because of the way he called him "Boy."

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled ToBeABoy:

I've never liked being called "Boy." It's not the word itself but it's how it's said. The tone of voice, the inflection, how it just spits out like some racial epithet.

But it had an added sting that I didn't think it should have. For most of the time back home, I wracked my brain trying to find the reason why, what lost memory gave that small word such a big pain.

I found the answer in the book I came to Vegas with, the book that came to me in the log ladder so long ago.

Folks, if the pain I felt as I keyed this into the Wiki is any indication, life as a Grammer School student in Granite City must've been pure hell:

To be a Boy means you have no name. You will always be addressed by bad words. Even if people do use what they think your name is, it would have the same sting as a bad word. More often than not, you'll just be called 'Boy.'

To be a Boy means you cannot do a single thing right. Every thing you will do will be the wrong thing, even if you do it right. You will always say the wrong thing, or say it the wrong way, or say it too loudly, or not say it loud enough.

To be a Boy means that you should know the consequences of your actions. There will always be consequences to your actions. It doesn't matter if you do bad, do good, or do anything, or do nothing. You will always be punished, disciplined, reprimanded, and any other result. You will never be rewarded for what you've done.

To be a Boy means that nothing of yours will be safe. Any part of your body will be slapped, what you own will be taken away, your room will always be barged in by someone angry at you, you will always be grounded, you will always be swatted. It'll happen because of something they claim you've done, and it doesn't matter if you even remember doing it, or even done it at all. You're presumed Guilty, that's all that's needed.

To be a Boy means that you're just not needed when you're not being punished. Your interests will always be different, you will always be weird, and you will not be considered by others as someone they want to know more of. No one wants to be your friend, no one wants you in their groups, going into your neighborhoods, their businesses, their relationships, or anywhere else. You will be kicked out whatever you're in or not.

To be a Boy means that you're regulated to the basement of your parent's house, with no acceptable idea of what you want to do with your life. You will always be inadequate of going out on your own, and anything that would be even considered will fail utterly. And you will still be punished for your failure. A Boy at 11 is still a Boy at 16, and will still be a Boy at 35.

To be a Boy means that you do what needs to be done to keep Punishments to a minimum. That means avoiding other people as much as you can. You will live alone, even if that means staying in your mother's basement, strung out on the couch in front of that Television while they wonder what the hell is wrong . . .

Adam's thoughts snapped back to place with he felt two arms fall over his shoulders. He didn't know about it, but he was crying rivers out of his eyes. He knew the words over what he was feeling now, but he didn't need to say it.

"Oh Adam, you poor dear." Wendy said hugging him from behind. "That's what you were before you vanished, did you. And Sache brought all those fears back to you. The monster."

He nodded. He ran away to get away from people like Sache Hawking. He didn't want to run away from them again. He felt tired and weary one again, like the day Mom found him.

"You don't have to run away from him anymore, I promise."

Wendy continued to hold her son and let him cry himself to sleep. They were tears of relief over not having to be afraid of his past anymore. They're gone now, as his mother said in her soft smooth voice. The past is gone, no longer a problem for him anymore. He's in a safe place now, a hedge against the storms of living with grownups. No longer

will he has to deal with the constant disapproving eyes and angry voices over his shoulder. He no longer has to deal with the constant criticism and the fear that everything he could do would be wrong. That time has gone, long gone, as far away as he felt himself slipping, as he slipped back into that dark, warm, and peaceful place.

Wendy wasn't putting any more magic on him, she knows she wasn't, but it was her soft voice that makes it easy for him to go there. She likes sparking his imagination, encouraging him to day dream and enjoy being a child. A child instead of a 'Boy.'

"You know," Wendy said as she left the room for the down stairs, "You were really brave in defending Vixen, Adam. Seems that my little fanship's rubbing you the right way. I sure hope it did."

Adam fell asleep in a happier frame of mind. No longer was he that 'Boy' on the poem. Not as long as he's close to his mother and far away from the "Old Codfish" known as Sache Hawkings. Whatever this education is, he can get one without his 'help,' thank you so much.

He didn't hear someone enter his room as he slept. It was neither Wendy nor Tara, however. Vixen's concern over her hero of the day caused her to venture into a place few girls dared to go: A boy's bedroom.

She peeked over the top of the stairs, her shoes off so she won't make a sound, and looked around, her trusty kit by her side. Vixen found out that Adam's an avid reader, because there's a lot of books, a lot more than that Harry Potter book set on the desk. The desk also housed a coffee can full of pencils, a pile of notebooks, and on the center, a large coffee-table book entitled "Two Tails." Behind it was a crystal candle holder, a new candle flickering inside. Vixen blew it out, the flame reduced to a stream of smoke.

She turned to the bed, and found Adam deep asleep in his green T-shirt and boxer briefs. She heard his deep breathing and saw his chest rise. She turned her head to the side, thinking what he'd look like dressed as Wendy's favored character, and suppressed a chuckle. She moved closer, crept on the bed, and snuggled up next to the sleeping Adam. She kissed him on the cheek and nestled over his shoulder, and hearing the sound of his heart inside his warm chest, she fell asleep by him, a smile on her face that was shared by the dreaming Adam. It wasn't long before Todd joined in, hopping on the bed and curling up next to his partner's hero.

Chapter 04

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled "BookofTwoTails":

Probably the most important clue over what happened to me, the best clue to my past, is the book that came to me that Christmas Eve.

To the public eye, this book just looks like one of those books that you'll find in rare book libraries. It's bound in leather, decorated in gold with the words "Two Tails" on the cover, and can be locked like some girl's diary. It would be perfect on anyone's coffee table. I've already been told how priceless it looks like just by the cover alone.

It's when it's opened and you looked at the pages is where the real value of this book lies.

Think of the movie The Neverending Story¹. There was a book that seems to have a mind of its own. The words seem to appear and disappear. The pictures and scenes become so vivid that it can pull yourself physically into it. You find yourself actively participating in the story written on it. This kind of book is the exception to the saying that "The Print is Dead."

My Book has a similar nature. It writes and rewrites by itself, can translate itself to suit its reader, and have six numbers on its inside cover that I can just lean back and watch them change every ten to twenty minutes. Not only is the print in this book very much alive, but it also seems to have a mind of its own. Even Bastain and Attrau would claim that my book "just ain't normal."

What does those numbers mean remains a mystery. So does how and why it came to me while I was on that log ladder. It's a mystery I hope to solve before I die.

"Shagging!?" Adam's voice had some shock in it. "Mom, I'm still in the cootie stage."

"And I've seen the Discovery Channel, Auntie," Vixen added. "Do you know how much it makes me want to retch when they show what they do to something you need to do Number One—"

"VIXEN!!" Wendy said, her voice stern and authoritative; a proper voice of a British Nanny. She knows that the two haven't done anything wrong. In fact, she thought it was cute when she found them like that. She just said something about not wanting the two to take things too far.

Elrohir laughed at the two. "That's my daughter for you. She can be a bit to handle at times, but I just can't imagine life without her." He glanced at the young man next to Vixen. "It seems to me that she's taking a shining to you, doesn't she?"

1 Link goes to the official site of the movie and novel series.

Adam gulped and blushed. He looked at Vixen, but she only gave him a shy wink and a "Maaaaayyyyybeeeeeeee." with a giggle.

Wendy rolled her eyes. Elrohir laughed again.

"Too bad that being her hero wasn't any easier for Adam, with what happened with Sache Hawkings."

"Tell me about it," Wendy said, her mood lowered by the mention of that name. "How'd he find out about Adam's existence is beyond me; I certainly won't tell him."

Sache shook his head. "Good thing I don't have to deal with him over Vixen. Native American households are exempt from public schools. I can either put her in a tribal school or the private school I send her to."

"St. Norbert's?"

"Yeah, that one."

"I know the Nun running that place." Wendy took a look toward Adam, who was starting to fidget. The mention of school make him very nervous. "She's very nice and calm toward even the so-called problem kids I get. Someone who had a rather real problem with School in general would be perfect for her."

Elrohir nodded and turned to Adam. "I take it you had a rough time in school before you came here."

Adam gulped and inhaled to speak. "I-it's why ah ran away in the first place, ah think."

"Still having problems remembering?"

"More like ah don' wanna remember."

"If what happened yesterday was any indication, I don't blame you."

Adam nodded.

"I'll vouch for St. Norbert's, young'un. They'll treat you a lot better there. Like I said before, I trust them with Vix."

Adam turned to Vixen, who sent him a coy smile.

"By the way, I heard that you've wrote about what you felt back then on that book of yours."

Adam nodded again. "Ah don't know how I wrote it in there. It ain't in my handwriting."

"Mind if I see that book? I'm just curious about it."

"Sure thing."

Adam ducked upstairs for half a minute, and then came back down.

"I got the book here," Adam said as he placed the book on the table.

Elrohir made a mental note on how old looking the book is as Adam works the book's lock free, and then gasped when he saw what was on the book. "Adam, since when did you learn Cherokee?"

Adam blinked, "huh?"

“Cherokee. That’s the language this book is written in.”

“It just looks like English to me.”

“Wha--”

Wendy crooked her head over to what was on the book. To her as well, the words were in English, and he pointed to a phrase on the exposed page and read it aloud. “I frequent this place.”

To Adam’s eyes the phrase was “I go there often,” and he said so.

“Huh?” Wendy realized that she was reading the British version of English, while Adam was reading the American version. Elrohir was reading a written language of the Cherokee tribe. And all three of them were on the same page.

“I might be stating the obvious,” Elrohir said, “but I don’t think that this book is normal.”

The others nodded, including Vixen who was watching from a distance and crept up to Adam and rested her chin on his shoulder. “Do you know where you got it?”

Adam shrugged with his free shoulder. “I don’t know much. It just came to me in a snowstorm one night...”

He could remember the tears burning his cheeks and the winds lapping around him at the top rung of the log ladder. He could feel the icy air turn to a warm fire as the book hovered toward him.

“...I had it ever since. I only wish I knew any more.”

“I think I know of someone who would help us figure out more about your book, Adam,” Elrohir said. “I just hope you can deal with Catholic Nuns.”

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled SaintNorberts:

Ever seen the movie Boy'sTown¹? It's based on the true story behind the real live version, about a Father Flannigan got the idea to build a place for abandoned and runaway kids can go so that they don't end up in jails and become hardened criminals like the one he was giving the Last Rights to on the way to his execution. He's the polar opposite to the Sache Hawkings of the world, the type of believes that there is no such thing as a Bad Boy.

I have mixed feelings about Father Flannigan. On one side I'm glad that he lived in the 50s and has passed away by now. He couldn't be able to build a Boy's Town today, where it is all to easy to lump Catholic Priests together with Michael Jackson. But on the other hand, let's face it. We *need* people like Father Flannigan to reach out to these kids—kids like me—before we really do make a mess of our lives.

Fortunately for me, I have a smaller version of Boy's Town in my part of town. St. Norbert Monastery was founded by the Spanish while Nevada was still part of Mexico

¹ Link to the official Boy's Town web site.

and the synagogue still has the clay architecture. Over time additional buildings were made around it, until it covered two city blocks. Outside of the church itself which I've only seen twice before—we're not a Catholic family, and I don't think they'd approve of giving the Virgin Mary pixie wings—and the convent where the priests and nuns live, a private school was built as well as a boarding home for kids who don't have a place to live; either by being orphans or by being throwaways—the latter has become more common lately.

The school itself is semi-private. The public school board helps with the funding because it is the designated “Geek School,” the one school in the district where the students who were having similar problems in school as I had were sent to. To a new student's surprise, St. Norbert's Academy is quite liberal for a school run by Catholics. Although they do have a course on what their religion is, you don't really have to be a Catholic to go there. Instead of focusing on standardized test taking, students learn at their own pace, and at times you can have classes where several grades are run at the same time. This flexible program coupled with making Physical Education elective—although the gym in this school is actually a MartialArtsDojo—not only allows students to go through high school at a faster pace; many students get their diplomas before they reach 16, but it also shortens the school day to five hours. Standard Classes go from 9am to 2pm, with a breakfast and a lunch at each end. You can go to the electives after 2:45 or you can just bail and go home. Even the dress code is liberal for a Catholic school. Even though most students use uniforms, but not only are they optional but they are customizable as well. You can make your uniform to suit your taste as long as they pass decency guidelines. I know of some uniforms that include leather jackets, western cowboys, and there is a Native American clique that adapted their traditions to their uniforms. I even seen a goth version.

St. Norbert's Academy is run by the Mother Superior of the church, Sharon Alera. Take all those stern stereotypes of the ruler packing nun and toss them out the window, she's not like that at all. Her quiet soft-spoken demeanor reminds me more of Mother Theresa but with a better living quarters. She even swapped the traditional habit for a simple robe and rosary, which is what she usually wears whenever I see her.

“I take it you see English when you read from this book,” Mother Sharon said as she looked at Adam's book.

Adam nodded, which gave him enough time to muster his voice. “What language do you see?”

“Latin.”

Adam blinked. “I don't know how everyone can see this book in a different language.”

Mother Sharon scratched her chin, “I agree with you. Elrohir did say that there is something magical about this book. And he said that you got it in a snowstorm as well.”

Adam nodded again, and fidgeted a little bit.

“Oh, come on, it's not like I'm going to dunk it in Holy Water or something. Kids these

days, so desensitized by movies and television. Just like with these Harry Potter books; witchcraft, maybe, but at least you're *reading*. Not too many readers out there nowadays. Hmm, what's this?"

Mother Sharon found her way to the inner front cover, and the six numbers written on it:

01	35	42
24	13	57

"Hmmm. Adam, do you know what these numbers mean?"

"I dunno. Your guess is as good as--"

A candle flame's worth of orange-red flame appeared over the 57. It vanished as sudden as it appeared, but when it disappeared, the 57 has changed to a 38.

"Adam, did this happen before."

"Many times. It seems to write itself."

Mother Sharon nodded, finding what was happening very interesting.

"Have you ever seen of a book like this one, Ma'am?" Adam didn't know how to address a Mother Superior, and hoped that the common courtesy would be sufficient.

"Not personally," she said as she closed and locked the book. "But I might know someone who does from my connections with the Vatican. If you'd like, I'd like to look into it."

"O-kay," Adam said as he was given the book back.

"I don't know if you are deep in religious stuff as I am, but I believe that everything happens for a reason and a purpose. I think there's a reason you're here with that book in your hands. I don't think either of us know what it is yet, Adam, but I'm certain you'll find them."

Adam smiled at that.

She hoped that Adam's warming up to her will make what's coming easier. "In the meantime, I'd hope you consider my invitation to have St. Norbert's as the place you'll go to. I heard a but too much over what happened to you in *both* public schools, and Sashe Hawkings isn't very kind to you."

He sighed at that wondering about what to say.

"From what I read about you, I don't blame you not liking school. The way it turned you into a dummy." Mother Sharon gave his head a gentle scuff "This may come as a shock, but I think you're too smart for school."

"Wha?"

"You know that test you took?"

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled StandardizedTests:

You have *got* to be kidding me?! *This* is how the Public Schools figure out whatever or not a student can graduate?! This isn't going to prepare a kid for the rest of his life. “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?” is *not* and will *never be* a college major or a career path!!

“I take it you listened to my advice on the spices to your veggie soup, Senorita,” A well fed Latino boy said as he sniffed over the counter at the lunch line. “I can smell the chipotle.”

“I sure did, Roberto,” Miss. Cora, the resident chef from the convent, said. “And I made a lot of it too. So much that everyone’s entitled to an second helping if they want.”

“Mmmmm, me like.”

“I thought you would, being the resident foodie and all.”

“Gracias, Miss. Cora,” Roberto said and he headed downstream on the line.

She turned to who was next. “My, I haven’t seen you here before. You must be the Mystran kid we heard about.”

“Ola?!” Roberto turned around, to find the reddish haired preteen behind him. “You’re Adam Packbell?”

Adam fidgeted a bit, “er . . . y-yeah.”

“Ol Le Le, we got us a celebrity in Norbert’s!!” Roberto gave Adam a firm pat on the shoulder. “I’d tell you what he did, Miss. Cora, but you have two Sisters out back, and I don’t want to say something they find too sensitive.”

“Yeah, Rob,” Came a voice that was from a much older nun. “There’s such a thing as too much information, you know.”

“That goes without saying, Sinorita. Miss Cora, give him something special on his first day, si?”

He got an extra cheese and bologna sandwich cut across the corners to go with the large bowl of soup. “And like I said before, we’ll allow you to have a second helping of soup if you want it, and as much drinks as you want over at the fountain. All we ask is that you clean your place and,” she winked, “deal with the crusts yourself.”

“Oh, I don’t mind the crusts, ma’am.”

“You’re sure easy to please,” she said as she nodded for him to move on.

The students have already formed their cliques by the time Adam showed up. He saw Vixen over at one side talking to about eight other girls. She looked at him, waved and smiled.

He smiled back.

That produced a communal giggle from the other girls who then resumed their gossiping.

Adam wondered where he’ll be sitting.

“Hey Robbie! That’s Adam with you?”

“Ole, Motorhead!! I got our little berry-breaker with me.”

“Then tell him to sit with us, Hombre!”

He needn’t worry about where he’ll be sitting. He sat with Roberto, Victor, and spiky-haired Hamadi.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled FriendsList:

Roberto Ortega:

There are some people who have mixed feelings about how he came here. He was born on this side of the border by what some call <quote>Undocumented Workers</quote> who crossed what could be the worst protected border in the free world, gave birth to him, and managed to dump him into a fire station before the feds found them to ship them back to Mexico never to be seen again. Nice. Under the rules, because he was born in American soil, that means he’s an automatic US Citizen. Unfortunately it was under such rotten circumstances. Good thing there was a more legal Latino couple who couldn’t bear children who could take him.

He’d make a decent chef someday. Provided of course he doesn’t eat all the ingredients himself. :) At least when he tries out a recipe, he makes enough for him and his friends.

Hamadi Kawakami:

The younger of two brothers who moved in with the owner of the dojo over at St. Norbert’s. Couldn’t do very well with the environment of the Japanese School System (They also teach for StandardizedTests but at least the hosts in the quiz shows don’t make Anne Robinson look all so warm and fuzzy) so his parents thought that trying out an American Private School would be more suited for him.

He’s my supplier of all things Anime and Manga. He’s got a pile as tall as the Stratosphere and it grows by the yard every day. He’s also into building cars and bikes. I think he wants to have his own version of West Coast Choppers when he graduates. Good thing that Norbert’s has shop classes.

“I’m surprised that everyone knows what happened in that casino,” Adam said, “What was that one again, there’s so many in town that I--”

“The New York New York Casino, Adam-san. News travels fast.” Hamadi said after he smirked at the second sandwich on his plate. While most of the time Miss. Cora makes enough food to feed 100 hungry dudes like Roberto, not everyone gets the extra sides.

You have to have done something special to get that honor. Like being accepted to the school, or score the #1 spot on a big test. Or do what Adam did to a rival school. “It’s not something the Sisters here would want to encourage, don’t get me wrong, but when you take Josh Hawkings out by his family jewels—Instant Cool, my friend. Instant Cool.”

“He was harassing Vixen. What do you expect me to do?”

There was also the part about him being called *Boy*, but they didn’t need to be told that.

Besides, they had other topics on their minds: How they’re doing in class today, the next video game, girls . . . “That Vixen is soooo into you, Adam. I think you got muy lucky, dude.” . . . Books read lately, including the stack of manga Hamadi has which can, if piled up in a stack, top the Stratosphere, how much English dubbed translation suck to no end, Adam’s amnesia when the others noticed that he was just listening into the conversation . . .

“Yeah, that’s what Wendy told me. As weird as it sounds, she just found him wandering the desert without any record of where he was of any memory over what happened before then.”

“Ai Carumba. That must suck big time. I’d feel for you, Adam, but I haven’t had that happen to me nor want to.”

“Yeah. From the parts I do remember, I’m kinda glad I forgotten them all. Most of it would’ve been rather nasty, and most of it coming from a school not unlike Vegas North.”

“Whoa . . . that bad, hommes?”

“Guess so.” Adam was feeling nervous again.

“I had the same problem with the public schools in my home country, Adam-san,” Hamadi said. When my parents heard of Uncle Iruka becoming a teacher here in a school that specializes in people who don’t stay down no matter how hard you hammer, they sent me here. Believe me, they did a lot of hammering to me.”

“And to think having kids slipping through the cracks was a purely American problem thanks to congress and their school programs,” Victor added. “There’s a lot other reasons why someone’d end up here. Kids who got bullied to the point that the faculty gets scared of him, families who opt out of controversial classes and watch as their kids get flunked out, and my personal favorite: those who won’t take the Ritalin prescribed by the school nurse. Never take the Ritalin, Adam, trust me on this. It turns people into zombies so nobody would be bothered by them; that’s the only reason why they’d put kids on it, never mind this ADD crap.”

“Si. And with your memories taking that siesta in your head, Adam, I don’t know if you know of the bad rep those in the cloth have. The rep about Priests doing bad things to kids in the confessional. Mother Sharon don’t allow that here. Father Daniel and his Deacons tend to keep to themselves running the church part and let her shepherd us black sheep around.

And they’re cool if you’re a different religion as well. I know of a Baptist Church that also uses the buildings here, and the gym Hamadi calls home contain an actual Shinto

Shrine and Zen Garden where I go at times for siestas. You'll like this place, amigo, trust me on this."

"I might . . ." Adam said. "I might . . . if I can just get over my school jitters."

At that point, Mother Sharon arrived with papers in her hand. "You might not need to get over them for long, Adam."

Adam didn't pretend to understand the results of that test. He took Mother Sharon's word for it: There are some areas to be worked on, of course; History, Civics, and the like. The majority of those areas can be attributed to Adam's amnesia (in Sharon's mind) or Adam's disappearance from the face of the Earth for over a decade (in the accompanying Wendy's mind). But the parts that focused on the fundamentals; the Math, Reading, Comprehension, Logic, and all the other basics; the ratings could only be described as 'off the scale.'

"Son," Mother Sharon told him from his side, "While there may be some subjects where you need to catch up on, but with these ratings, at your age . . ."

"Eleven," Wendy injected.

"At age Eleven, you could get into High School level. And your reading and vocabulary are at *College* level. Your intelligence is that high, Adam."

Adam could only scratch his head at this, his face etched with confusion.

"You're having a hard time believing it, I see."

Adam's face was flushed, not expecting to feel again the feeling he felt last night.

"From what I heard about your former schools, I don't blame you for feeling this way, especially when you could be too smart for that school."

"Yeah, Adam," Wendy added, "I've seen this before. I've seen a lot of genius kids who started in kindergarten taking classes in the next grade, but couldn't fit into their environment, so they began to suffer in their grades, and end up either flunking out or advancing by social promotion because the teachers don't want to deal with them anymore. I think that's what happened to you, my dear."

Mother Sharon nodded in agreement. "I know it is hard for you to believe that you're a bright person, while everyone else thinks you're just some dumb boy . . ."

Adam's warmth toward Mother Sharon returned. Another one who considers *boy* derogatory.

"And from what I heard and seen from you, I think you'd like to learn things even though you wouldn't admit it. Most kids do want an education, but find school to get in the way. That's why I made St. Norbert's as an alternative. I hope that you'd want to come here to get that education you want and need."

Wendy then tilted her head out the door. "And I'm sure that you two on the outside of the office would agree . . ."

There was at least two GASP!'s from the hallway.

“. . . if you weren’t scared of being caught as an eavesdropper, that is.”

Mother Sharon only chuckled at that. She knew that, at the least, Vixen and Victor would be curious over Adam’s test results enough to play the lookie-loo; and she did hear that these two, as well as others, were vouching for the school. Perhaps these two would be the deciding factor in Adam’s choice of school.

What surprised Mother Sharon is how persuasive she can get. My, did she flirt. She must like Adam or something.

“Your Peter seems to have found his Wendy, my dear Ms. Mystran,” Mother Sharon said to Adam’s mother.

Expert from Adam Packbell's Wiki, Entry entitled AdamAsPan:

I’ll admit it. I’m a mama’s boy. I love my mother to death. She picked me off the street when she didn’t have to. She took me into her home when she didn’t have to. She made me her son when she didn’t have to. I owe my life to Wendy Darling Mystran. I don’t mind her Peter Pan at all. I even have 2-3 copies of the costume—tights and all—and wear them for her, even to sleep. In fact, some of my normal clothes are variations of that costume. (My School Uniform, for example, uses the same colors.)

It’s not like I’m picking up my mother’s Otakudom, but I feel a connection somehow to Peter Pan. It’s like I know the stories by heart before she could even tell them, and how I can dream about Neverland so vividly, that I could actually smell salt water and hear pixie bells. I’d even fly if I could. And Mother even encourages me to act them out. Make my own Peter Pan stories. She could see my eyes light up and sparkle as I do so.

I thought long and hard about whatever or not I put all this in this Wiki. Some of you would think it’s bizarre, right up there with the fursuit. In the end, I decided to put it in because my memories are so vivid, so intimate, that they couldn’t be the result of an active child-like imagination.

Could it be another clue as to where I’ve been? Even if it wasn’t Neverland, it could be somewhere...else.

By evening time, Adam was feeling so good and proud over the test and the acceptance of St. Norbert’s that his mother decided to make it a special event. And to Wendy Darling, that means that he gets dressed up as her first and best boyfriend.

“If you’re intending on crowing over becoming a 9th grader in St. Norbert’s, you’re going to look the part,” Wendy said as she pulled the green tunic over the tights. “Besides, This is a celebration, and you’ve gotta look your best, do you?”

When he came down the stairs behind Mother, with a bright smile and sparkling eyes which she always adored, he found out that there was someone else joining in on the fun.

To Adam's surprise, dressed as the Wendy Darling from the Disney version of the story, with a similar bright smile and sparkling eyes, was Vixen. "Hi Adam."

Almost on instinct the two bowed and curtsied to each other.

"You really do look like Peter Pan dressed like that."

He knew he did, and he had some pride at that, but--

"I'm surprised you're not laughing--"

"Oh come on!"

Vixen went over and swung her arms over his shoulders, their noses met. "You're so cute and handsome, I thought I'd play along. In fact, I have something for you."

She took one hand over to something she had tucked behind a sash on the dress, it was a silk pouch from which a silver necklace was pulled. On the necklace was a silver thimble with the word "Vixen Telemar" etched on it.

At the same time, Wendy dropped a similar pouch with another necklace inside. When Adam pulled it out, he saw an silver acorn with "Adam Packbell" on it.

The two put their necklaces on each other's necks. There were elaborate versions of friendship bracelets, styled like Wendy's favorite story. A story played out in a remixed version before her very eyes.

The pair laid on the shag floor enjoying a delivered pizza, Vixen leaning up against him as he sat, eating from one hand and reaching behind her with the other to touch her ever young hero. They thought it would be a relatively quiet evening under the stars when Wendy appeared with a set of keys, a couple flashlights and a box of fuses. "I've just found out that the fuses are out in the garage out in back. Why don't you two go in there and explore around for a while?"

"We get to have an adventure for tonight?"

She nodded with a smile.

Vixen wasn't one who would be afraid of the Vegas night sky, especially with the lack of storms during the year. Lack of moisture in the air only means that the stars can be seen, even in suburbia. And the appearance of even the most dangerous desert animal doesn't give her much pause, thanks to her father's influence. She once got a swarm of killer bees to disperse, which wasn't easy to do.

Pitch black indoor darkness, however, was a different story. She clung to the brave and handsome Adam and his costume, as light as the flowing dress she wore, as he lead the way without even an hint of fear. To him that flashlight was like a sword, slashing away at any evil monstrosity in the darkness.

Unless of course, if her hand strayed a bit and touched him . . .

That would make any preteen boy jump, and Adam is no different.

She would do that multiple times this night, and some of them by accident. Every time it happened she would giggle at the reaction and snuggled up to him, so cute and courageous, never wanting to leave him.

She got a real good look of Adam's tights when he found that fuse box and climbed up to put the fuses in one by one. Vixen held his legs to steady him, and while he was screwing in fuses he wondered if she was enjoying herself a bit too much down there, with the way she was holding him. Part of him stopped minding; if Adam Packbell gets cooties today, let him get them from Vixen.

But he had to wonder: Did Peter Pan ever get this treatment from Wendy Darling? He could just see the Wendy taking Peter into a far off grove so they'll be alone and do something more suitable for The Discovery Channel than The Wonderful World of Disney.

"There," Adam said as he screwed in the last fuse and flicked on the lights, one by one.
"Now we can explore this house without us bumping into anything."

Adam would swear that he and her both were pouting as he climbed down.

As the lights of the garage flickered on, they found a sliding panel that Adam didn't notice before. With Vixen holding on to the nearest arm, he forced the panel open with his free one.

It revealed another room he wasn't aware of. A room that was plush and carpeted, with several couches, a refrigerator, a TV with two game systems (A Playstation and the new Game Cube). It was made to be a place to go if someone wanted to get away from everything else in the world and just crash. There was a note on the TV that stated just that.

"I think . . . I've found the treasure, Vix . . . someone added a hideout . . . just for . . ."

Vixen was so close that their noses touched. Her arms hung over his shoulders, and her dress flowing over his grass green legs. She pulled close to him and gazed into his eyes.

"I think I have found my treasure. Right here."

As she embraced his lips with hers, just like she embraced his body with hers, he somehow knew what she meant. What he felt with her was altogether new to him. At first it unnerved him, but he started to relax, and after a moment, he started to like it. He wrapped his own arms around her, pulled her close to his body, closed his eyes, and enjoyed the moment.

It would be the moment they shared for the whole weekend, as they romped, played, dreamed and enjoyed the time together. At times Tara Kit would pop in to check up on them and ensure that the place wasn't trashed too much, but mostly it was just them, Adam and Vixen, Peter and Wendy, in their own little Neverland.

And Wendy smiled as she watched them from the attic window.